

News from
Congressman Jim Oberstar

Winter 2003

Dear Friend,

The convening of the 108th Congress on January 7th is an appropriate occasion to preview important legislation that Congress will consider in 2003, as well as to offer a report on the 107th Congress.

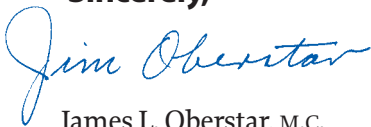
As the nation confronts security threats, economic instability, a health care crisis, corporate fraud and other major problems, President Bush and the Republican-controlled Congress appear to be on a course that ignores the urgent needs of hard-working families in these harsh economic times.

Taxpayers should also be aware of recent decisions by the Bush Administration to reward presidential appointees and senior management while reducing wage adjustments for lower- and middle-income career federal employees and freezing funding for emergency personnel.

I have urged the 108th Congress to move quickly on legislation to stimulate the national economy, create a million jobs this year, and act on long-term legislation vital to the nation's transportation and infrastructure systems.

In the coming weeks, I look forward to meeting with the people of Northern Minnesota at my "Hometown Values Forums" to discuss issues that are important to you.

Sincerely,



James L. Oberstar, M.C.

Congressman Oberstar has an office near you! If you have questions about these or any other issues, call us or visit our website at www.house.gov/oberstar



- Duluth** 218-727-7474
- Chisholm** 218-254-5761
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America's Health Care System is Not Meeting the Need for End-of-Life Care



Congressman Oberstar provides an update on Medicare prescription drug legislation at Duluth's First Lutheran Church in September 2002.

Many Americans have been personally touched by the experience of caring for elderly parents or terminally ill spouses and children as they lived out their final days. My wife, Jean, and I have both lost spouses, who succumbed at an unusually early age to cancer, and we have also tended to disabled and frail parents. My experience in these difficult situations has been that our health care system is a patchwork quilt of inadequate services that carry with them substantial expense and inconvenience.

The way that most Americans come to the end of life has changed dramatically in the last half-century. Unlike the 20th Century, a great many of us will live for months, or even years, with serious chronic illness. **In**

the near future, we will see a significant increase in the number of people facing serious illness and death. We must learn how to arrange and pay for services that can support the burgeoning numbers of aging Baby Boomers, and we must provide far better support for family caregivers than we do now.

I am committed to the challenge of supporting caregivers and of arranging health care services to meet the changing needs of the last phase of life. To that end, I introduced the "Living Well with Fatal Chronic Illness Act" in July 2002, which seeks to improve end-of-life care from two angles: supporting caregivers and requiring studies on end-of-life care by numerous federal agencies to improve knowledge of fatal chronic illness and delivery of care. I introduced this legislation with the intention of initiating the critical national dialogue on end-of-life care—an issue most of us are reluctant to discuss, but one which all of us, eventually, will face.

The 107th Congress adjourned without acting on the legislation, and as we look to the 108th Congress, the atmosphere in Washington, D.C. presents new challenges with a Republican-controlled House and Senate. However, the challenges of improving end-of-life care are not new, and my commitment is steadfast. I will reintroduce the end-of-life care bill in the 108th Congress and will continue working hard to generate bipartisan Congressional support.



Congressman Oberstar and his wife, Jean, discuss his end-of-life care legislation with the medical community at the Miller Dwan Medical Center in Duluth.

America Should Set a New Course Regarding Energy Policy

The 108th Congress has a great opportunity to establish an energy policy that will rebuild our national economic prosperity by ensuring adequate and affordable supplies of energy, improving the economic efficiency of our energy use, and keeping other important policy goals, such as environmental protection, in mind as we sort through energy policy choices.

We must craft a comprehensive and balanced energy policy that will provide reliable and affordable supplies of energy. In the short term, there is a need to sustain and increase domestic production of oil and natural gas. However, the federal government has leased vast tracts of the Gulf of Mexico to oil companies, which are not doing much to explore and produce on these tracts. Congress and the Administration should inquire into the failure of those companies to explore and produce under existing domestic leases and then move onto other options.

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The new Congress needs to take a serious approach to increasing vehicle fuel efficiency standards. Our import dependence on foreign oil is driven by increasing demand in the transportation sector. We must decrease that dependence. **According to the National Academy of Sciences' study on CAFE standards, "Fuel efficiency improvements for passenger cars, suvs and light trucks alone could reduce demand by 1.5 million barrels of oil a day."**

Automobile fuel economy standards were originally passed in 1975, and the result was a dramatic increase in the efficiency of new car fleets. However, the standards have been capped at 27.5 miles per gallon for new cars since 1986, and the exemption of SUVs and minivans from this standard has led to the steady decline in the combined fleet-wide average ever since. Current fleet-wide averages have fallen to just 24.5 mpg, the lowest level since 1981. A proposal introduced in the 107th Congress by Representative Ed Markey would raise automobile fuel economy over 15 years. The current standard for passenger vehicles is 27.5 mpg. In 2017, the standard for passenger vehicles would be close to 40mpg. I support the Markey proposal, because it would result in cumulative savings to consumers of \$100 billion at the gas pump, cumulative savings of 239 billions of gallons of gasoline, and a reduction of 468 million tons of greenhouse gases.

In 1998, as part of the surface transportation law, I worked to include a program to develop fuel cell buses to replace existing diesel buses. I am hopeful that a comprehensive energy plan will significantly expand this program and help us achieve greater energy independence. I am also hopeful that an energy plan will include my proposal to expand the use of photovoltaic energy, or solar electric power, in new and existing federal buildings.

It is vitally important to strengthen our current oversight program for pipelines to enhance safety and reliability. The Department of Transportation's Office of Pipeline Safety must stringently enforce pipeline safety laws in order to protect human health,

as well as environmental standards. Our nation has 2.2 million miles of pipelines that annually transport more than 600 million ton-miles of hazardous liquids and 20 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. **We need to ensure that pipelines are as safe as possible, and that the public is informed of the measures taken to secure their safety.**

The 108th Congress has a unique opportunity to pass a comprehensive energy plan that will spur the U.S. economy, while striking a sensible balance between increased energy supply, alternative energy development, adequate energy infrastructure, and sound energy efficiency.

Transportation Issues Will be High on Congress' Agenda

The 108th Congress faces critical choices in nearly every mode of the nation's transportation system.

The federal surface transportation program, which funds the nation's highways, bridges and transit programs, expires on September 30, 2003, and must be reauthorized in legislation that originates in the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, on which I serve. Relief for congested cities and funding for vital rural transportation projects will face intense competition from advocates for further tax cuts and increased funding for defense and Homeland Security.

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The authorizing legislation for important federal aviation programs also expires at the end of the current fiscal year, September 30, 2003. With the nation's second largest airline, United Airlines, joining US Airways, the sixth largest domestic air carrier, in bankruptcy, there will be great pressure on the 108th Congress to reexamine the entire domestic aviation system—from route structure to financing of capital expenditures for security. The fate of air service to many smaller communities hangs in the balance.

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The authorization for Amtrak expired in 2002. Without continued federal funding, our only national passenger rail system may be forced to shut down. Among the questions facing this Congress: Will we commit sufficient funds to this national vital asset? What should the role of states be in passenger rail? How will Amtrak interconnect with emerging technologies in rail transportation?

The last time the federal surface transportation and aviation programs were reauthorized, 1998 and 2000 respectively, I led the successful fight to make both measures significant victories for the environmental and alternative transportation (bicycles, pedestrians) movements. **Those victories are very much at risk this year.**

Each of these issues will be viewed through the lens of transportation security. What additional actions—at what additional cost—must be taken to secure each mode of the nation's transportation system?

Congressman Oberstar Announces 2003 Hometown Values Forum Schedule

This year, Congressman Oberstar will hold three “Hometown Values Forums” to give citizens an opportunity to express their views on key initiatives being considered by Congress and the President. Each Hometown Values Forum will entail a brief presentation by Congressman Oberstar, who will introduce the subject of the forum and the panel participants, followed by brief statements from a panel of experts on the forum theme. The remainder of the forum will be devoted to comments from citizens, as well as dialogue with the Congressman and panel members. Those not wishing to present oral comments may submit written testimony to any of Congressman Oberstar’s four district offices or the Washington, D.C. office.

Hometown Values Forum #1: Healthy People-Healthy Places

Monday, February 17, 7:00-9:00 p.m., Cambridge Community College

★ **Topic:** Obesity is becoming a national epidemic among both adults and children. Public health experts estimate that as many as 75% of Americans lead sedentary life styles, failing to get the recommended minimum amount of regular physical activity. One reason for this alarming trend, public health experts say, is that our communities are no longer well designed for walking, bicycling or other physical activity, but instead are designed for vehicular traffic. What can civic leaders and citizens do to make their communities healthier and more conducive to physical activity, and what tools are available to reach those goals?

Hometown Values Forum #2: Reauthorization of the Federal Highway and Surface Transportation Program

Monday, April 14, 7:00-9:00 p.m. Brainerd Lakes Community College

★ **Topic:** In 1998, Congress enacted and the President signed into law TEA-21, the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century, which authorized \$32 billion annually in federal highway, transit and related transportation spending. With its emphasis on congestion mitigation, alternative means of transportation and air quality improvement targets, leading environmentalists have called TEA-21 the single most important piece of environmental legislation in the last decade. Congress must reauthorize the entire federal transportation program in 2003. Which policies should be retained? Which should be changed or abandoned? What percentage of federal spending should go to highways? To transit? To alternative transportation modes?

Hometown Values Forum #3: End-of-Life Care

Date and location to be announced.

★ **Topic:** Many Americans have been personally touched by the experience of caring for elderly parents, terminally ill spouses or children living out their final days. What changes must the federal government make to arrange and pay for services that can support the unprecedented numbers of aging Baby Boomers? How can we do a better job of supporting family caregivers? What are your personal experiences in care-giving and your thoughts on the challenges our country, our health care systems, and our health care professionals face in regard to end-of-life care?

President Halts First Responder Money, Gives Cash Bonuses to Presidential Appointees and Senior Managers

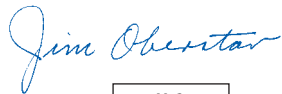
In December 2002, the Bush Administration revealed that it froze \$651 million in grants for the nation's firefighters, police officers and emergency workers—known as “first responders.” While grant money is expected to be available once the President and Congress agree on Fiscal Year 2004 spending bills, the decision means that in the interim, money not will be spent to fulfill the huge demand for first responder grants to states and localities. It also means that money for new grants, used to fund such things as training and equipment for firefighters and anti-terrorism assistance for local police departments, could be severely delayed throughout 2003.

On November 27, 2002, the President notified Congressional leaders that he was recommending a lower wage adjustment for middle and lower-income federal workers than what Congress had approved. Concurrently, the President decided that several thousand presidential appointees and senior managers throughout the federal government were eligible for year-end cash bonuses, thus rescinding a Clinton Administration policy prohibiting presidential appointees and senior managers from being eligible for bonuses. For the first time in eight years, cabinet-level officials and agency chiefs were authorized to approve annual awards of up to \$10,000—and possibly more—for senior attorneys, policy advisers, and other appointees who are brought onto their staffs. Financial awards can total \$25,000—or higher with approval from the White House. Presidential appointees and senior managers typically earn up to \$140,000 a year, while the average salary for civilian, non-political federal employees is \$45,000 a year.

“On the day after Thanksgiving, President Bush announced that because of the cost of the war on terrorism, the government cannot afford to proceed with a scheduled pay increase for civilian federal employees. Meanwhile, he approved cash bonuses to make several thousand presidential appointees and senior managers eligible for annual bonuses of up to \$25,000,” Congressman Oberstar said. **“Offering cash bonuses to presidential appointees while cutting back on pay increases to rank-and-file career civil servants and freezing funding for first responders is an affront to those who have been the backbone of our domestic war against terrorism.”**

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